United Nations E/CN.6/2000/2

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
31 December 1999

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Forty-fourth session
28 February-17 March 2000
Item 3 of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women

Follow-up to and implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The General Assembly, in its resolution 53/120 of 9 December 1998, requested the Secretary-General to report annually to it, through the Commission on the Status of Women and the Economic and Social Council, on follow-up to and progress in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Similar mandates were also contained in General Assembly resolutions 50/203, 51/69 and 52/100. The present report emphasizes efforts undertaken by the Secretariat in support of mainstreaming a gender perspective and follow-up activities, including activities undertaken by non-governmental organizations, since the submission of the previous report of the Secretary-General on the subject (E/CN.6/1999/2 and Add.1). It contains a response to resolution 43/2 of the Commission on the Status of Women on women, the girl child and human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome.

The present report has one addendum, which contains a joint work plan for the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

* E/CN.6/2000/1.

00-24074 (E) 010200

Contents

		Paragraphs	*Page*
I.	Introduction	1–6	3
II.	Progress in the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and in mainstreaming a gender perspective within the United Nations system	7–41	3
	A. General Assembly and Economic and Social Council	8–18	3
	B. Activities in support of mainstreaming a gender perspective into the work of the United Nations system	19–28	6
	C. ACC Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality	29–33	8
	D. Update on national action plans	34	9
	E. Reported activities of non-governmental organizations and other institutions of civil society	35–41	9
III.	Information supplied in accordance with specific mandates	42–128	10
	A. Situation of Palestinian women and assistance provided by organizations in the United Nations system	42–83	10
	B. Release of women and children taken hostage in armed conflicts and imprisoned	84–92	15
	C. Women, the girl child and human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome	93–128	16

I. Introduction

1. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1996/6, on follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women, established the work programme of the Commission on the Status of Women, in particular the items to be included on the agenda of the Commission. As regards documentation for the sessions of the Commission, the Council decided, *inter alia*, that under item 3 (a) of the Commission's agenda, a review by the Secretary-General of mainstreaming a gender perspective within the United Nations system should be prepared on an annual basis.

2. In its resolution 53/120 of 9 December 1998, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report annually to it, the Commission on the Status of Women and the Economic and Social Council on follow-up to and implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Similar mandates were contained in General Assembly resolutions 50/203, 51/69, and 52/100.

3. In each of the three reports submitted in the course of a year, the information that is most pertinent to the respective intergovernmental body is provided. The report to the Commission on the Status of Women emphasizes efforts undertaken by the Secretariat in support of mainstreaming a gender perspective and follow-up activities undertaken by non-governmental organizations. The report to the Economic and Social Council focuses on facilitating the coordination function of the Council. The report to the General Assembly contains information from all entities of the United Nations system, including specialized agencies and international financial institutions, and an analysis of activities undertaken at the national level and by non-governmental organizations and civil society.

4. Section II of the present report has been prepared in compliance with General Assembly resolution 53/120. Section III responds to resolution 1999/15 of the Economic and Social Council on Palestinian women and to resolution 43/1 of the Commission on the Status of Women on the release of women and children taken hostage in armed conflict and imprisoned.

5. Section IV responds to resolution 43/2 of the Commission on the Status of Women on women, the girl child and human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome.

6. In addition, the present report includes an addendum, section V (E/CN.6/2000/2/Add.1), which responds to the request made by the Commission on Human Rights in its resolution 1999/41 and by the Commission on the Status of Women in its resolution 39/5 that a joint work plan be made available to the Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-fifth session and to the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-fourth session.

II. Progress in the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and in mainstreaming a gender perspective within the United Nations system

7. At its forty-fourth session, the Commission on the Status of Women will continue to conduct its assessment of progress achieved at different levels since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action[1] and in gender mainstreaming. In particular, it will undertake a comprehensive review and appraisal of the implementation of the Platform for Action and preparations for the special session of the General Assembly to be held from 5 to 9 June 2000. An assessment of activities of the United Nations system in follow-up to the Platform for Action in accordance with the system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women for the period 1996-2001 is contained in E/CN.6/2000/3. The present report complements those reports.

A. General Assembly and Economic and Social Council

1. Fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly

8. The report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (A/54/264) focused on follow-up activities undertaken by entities of the United Nations system, including human and financial means of implementation. The General Assembly adopted a resolution on follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (resolution 54/141 of 17 December 1999).

9. The Assembly also adopted a resolution on preparations for the special session, which had been recommended for adoption by the Commission on the Status of Women acting as preparatory committee for the special session at its second session in March 1999, through the Economic and Social Council (resolution 54/142). In that resolution, the Assembly took decisions on the format and agenda of the special session and on the documentation to be submitted to the preparatory committee at its third session in 2000. The preparatory committee will have before it a comprehensive report containing a review and appraisal of the implementation of the Platform for Action (E/CN.6/2000/PC/2), addressing achievements as well as obstacles encountered in the implementation of the 12 critical areas of concern. Emerging trends and issues and further actions and initiatives are highlighted in another report (E/CN.6/2000/PC/4). Discussions with relevant actors of civil society on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action have continued, as called for by the Assembly, and the results of the on-line working groups on the areas of concern will also be available to the preparatory committee (E/CN.6/2000/PC/CRP.1).

10. Encouraged by the General Assembly, the regional commissions have carried out, or are planning to hold, regional preparatory events that will provide input into the preparations for the special session. The results of the regional meetings will be available to the preparatory committee. Within given time constraints for finalization of documentation, the results are also taken into account in documentation prepared by the Division for the Advancement of Women.

11. In the same resolution, the General Assembly encouraged all entities of the United Nations system to be involved in preparatory activities and to participate at the highest level in the special session. An assessment of activities undertaken by the United Nations system in support of implementation of the Platform is contained in a report that is before the Commission on the Status of Women (E/CN.6/2000/3). United Nations-system participation in preparatory activities is currently a focus of inter-agency cooperation and coordination. The Chairperson of the Inter-agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality has encouraged the active involvement of all United Nations entities in that process. This could include support for preparations at the national level, such as awareness-raising, support for activities of national machineries and of non-governmental organizations, and the provision of feedback to the Secretariat on emerging trends and issues; provision of substantive input to the global preparatory process, such as studies or reports on particular issues falling within an entity's area of responsibility; and/or the organization of side events, such as panels, workshops and film-screenings, during the preparatory sessions and at the special session. Emphasis is also placed on ensuring that heads of agencies give due attention to, and personally participate in, the special session.

12. The Assembly decided that non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council and non-governmental organizations that were accredited to the Fourth World Conference on Women may participate in the special session without creating a precedent for future sessions of the Assembly. It decided to defer consideration of all the modalities for participation of non-governmental organizations in the special session until the next session of the preparatory committee. The preparatory committee is thus invited to consider this matter at its third session in March 2000.

13. In accordance with the same resolution, the Bureau of the preparatory committee convened a series of open-ended informal consultations to consider preparations for the special session. It submitted a draft of a political declaration, to be adopted by the special session, for consideration by States, and convened several informal meetings to discuss the draft. It also held informal consultations on a possible second document that might result from the special session. Based on these informal consultations, agreement was reached on the structure of a second outcome document. The Chairperson of the Bureau of the preparatory committee was entrusted with the preparation of a draft for consideration by delegations, in consultation with the Secretariat and the Bureau, and taking into account suggestions made by delegations during the consultations. Informal consultations on the modalities of participation of non-governmental organizations in the special session also took place in November and December.

14. The Assembly, at the recommendation of the Commission on the Status of Women and the Economic and Social Council, adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (resolution 54/4). The

Assembly thus fulfilled one of the commitments made by Governments at the World Conference on Human Rights (1993) and the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995). The Optional Protocol was opened for signature in a ceremony on 10 December 1999, Human Rights Day, and 23 States signed that day (Austria, Belgium, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Denmark, Ecuador, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, Senegal, Slovenia, and Sweden). The Optional Protocol will enter into force three months after the tenth instrument of ratification has been deposited with the Secretary-General. The Optional Protocol and its significance for women were the theme of a panel discussion to mark Human Rights Day at United Nations Headquarters. The Secretary-General made an opening statement. Ms. Aída González Martínez, Chairperson of CEDAW, Ms. Aloisia Wörgetter, Chairperson of the working group of the Commission on the Status of Women that drafted the optional protocol, Mr. Bacre Waly Ndiaye, Director of the New York Office of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Honourable Sujata Manohar, retired judge of the Supreme Court of India, and Ms. Fauzija Kassindja, of Equality Now, served on the panel, which was moderated by the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women. The Special Adviser and the High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a joint statement on the Optional Protocol and its significance for women worldwide.

2. Economic and Social Council, substantive session of 2000

15. Action taken by intergovernmental bodies in 1999, in particular the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council, has been reported to the Council (E/1999/54). The Commission's attention is drawn to the decision of the Commission on Human Rights to appoint a Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, requesting the Special Rapporteur to take into account a gender perspective when requesting and analysing information and to give special attention to the occurrence of multiple discrimination and violence against migrant women. The Special Rapporteur has met with the Division for the Advancement of Women to discuss the work done by the Division with regard to violence against migrant women workers, to exchange relevant information, and to discuss opportunities for cooperation. At its most recent session, the General Assembly adopted resolution 54/138 on this issue. (See also the report of the Secretary-General in document A/54/342.)

16. Information on the outcome of the Council's high-level segment of 1999 on the theme "The role of work and employment in poverty eradication: the advancement and empowerment of women" was provided to the Assembly (A/54/264).

17. The Council decided that the theme of its coordination segment in the year 2000 would be "Assessment of the progress made within the United Nations system, through the conference reviews, in the promotion of an integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations Conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields" (Council decision 1999/281). The Council's review of progress made in conference follow-up provides an opportunity to assess, and provide further guidance also on cross-cutting issues, especially on gender mainstreaming. In this regard, it will be recalled that the Council's agreed conclusions 1997/2 on gender mainstreaming have been instrumental in promoting progress in gender mainstreaming at the intergovernmental level, including the Council's functional commissions, and throughout the United Nations system with regard to normative and policy work, as well as in operational activities. The coordination segment of 2000 also provides an opportunity for an in-depth assessment of the follow-up given to gender-specific recommendations of other global conferences. This assessment should enable the Council to provide further guidance on how to achieve an optimal balance in intergovernmental and UN system work between women-specific activities in the framework of follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and other conferences and summits, and the mainstreaming of a gender perspective into all policies and programmes, independent of their specificity with regard to women. The Commission's attention is drawn to a note by the Secretariat on the Commission's follow-up to the Council's resolutions and decisions (E/CN.6/2000/5).

18. In accordance with the Beijing Platform for Action and resolutions of the General Assembly, the Council has considered follow-up to the Platform for Action at each of its three main segments. Since the

adoption of the Platform for Action, a fourth main segment, on humanitarian affairs, has been added to the Council's agenda. At its substantive session in 1999, in its agreed conclusions on the segment, the Council stressed the need to integrate a gender perspective into the planning and implementation of activities concerning humanitarian emergencies. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee has adopted a policy statement on the integration of a gender perspective into humanitarian assistance. The Commission may wish to consider recommending to the Council that the gender dimensions in humanitarian affairs should be addressed at one of the future segments.

B. Activities in support of mainstreaming a gender perspective into the work of the United Nations system

19. The Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women has continued to work with senior officials in departments and offices of the United Nations and in the entities of the United Nations system to increase attention to gender issues in all sectoral areas, especially through improved use of the gender mainstreaming strategy. The capacity of the Special Adviser in this regard has been strengthened by the recruitment of a Principal Officer on Gender Mainstreaming in her office in September 1999, funded through extrabudgetary contributions, to work in a catalytic and advisory manner to support the implementation of mainstreaming in entities of the United Nations system. The Special Adviser has also given particular attention to preparations for the special session of the General Assembly, including regional preparations. A summary of such activities is given below.

20. In a follow-up to General Assembly resolution 52/100 and to Economic and Social Council agreed conclusions 1997/2 on gender mainstreaming, in which all bodies that deal with programme and budgetary matters are requested to ensure that all programmes, medium-term plans and programme budgets visibly mainstream a gender perspective, the Committee on Programme and Coordination expressed the view that the Secretariat should make every effort to address the issue of gender sensitivity in the budgetary process.[2] In response to these mandates, the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 discusses the implications of gender mainstreaming as one of the factors underlying the budget proposals.[3] In response to the budget preparation instructions for the proposed programme budget, specific attention has been paid by a number of departments to gender mainstreaming. The document notes that although the concept may not be directly identified at the aggregate level of outputs and activities in the budget document, it will continue to be addressed at the policy and programme development stage, as well as during implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the outcome of the Organization's programmes and activities, in order to determine the extent to which the concerns and needs of the beneficiaries of the Organization's work – women as well as men – are adequately met. Such information would provide useful feedback for the preparation of future programme budgets and the determination of resource allocation.

21. Further insights into possible modalities, and benefits, of gender mainstreaming in budgets in the United Nations system are expected to be gained also from one of the ongoing projects of the ACC Inter-agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality. Phase I, an inventory of work on institutional budgets outside the United Nations system, started in December 1999. Phase II will look at the United Nations system itself, identifying what has been done and the potential that exists for reflecting gender equality in budgets. An interim report is expected to be ready at the time of the forty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women and will be presented in a workshop. Phase III will look in depth at a selected number of United Nations entities, making proposals for further steps.

22. In conjunction with her participation in the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council on the role of work and employment in poverty eradication: the advancement and empowerment of women, in July 1999 in Geneva, the Special Adviser met with the heads of the World Health Organization, the International Labour Organization and the International Trade Centre, with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as with officials of the Economic Commission for Europe, UNHCR, the International Telecommunication Union, and the World Intellectual Property Organization. The meetings allowed for exchanges of information on preparations under way in the agencies for the special session, on progress and specific steps taken to increase gender mainstreaming, and on issues of achieving the goals of gender balance and a gender-

sensitive work environment. The Special Adviser invited agencies to make specific contributions to the preparations, in the form, for example, of studies on particular issues or on how the operational activities of the agencies benefit women and contribute to the achievement of gender equality at the national level. During a meeting with senior women staff at Geneva, issues with regard to the achievement of the Organization's gender balance goals and other work-related matters were discussed.

23. The Special Adviser and the Division for the Advancement of Women continue to support the Department of Peacekeeping Operations/Lessons Learned Unit in the implementation of the project on mainstreaming a gender perspective in multidimensional peacekeeping operations.[4] After the launching of the project in June 1999, a consultant will join the Lessons Learned Unit in January 2000 to prepare a systematic gender analysis of selected peacekeeping operations. It is expected that the findings will be available in time for the special session.

24. The Special Adviser remains actively involved in the work of the Afghanistan Support Group and continues to support the work of the Gender Adviser to the United Nations system in Afghanistan. Information and reports prepared by the Gender Adviser on the current situation and its implications for United Nations system activities in that country are regularly shared with the Inter-agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality. The Special Adviser has also endeavoured to ensure that the Gender Adviser participates in the meetings of the Afghanistan Support Group.

25. The Special Adviser continues to support preparations for the special session. She participated in two regional preparatory meetings – namely, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) sixth African Regional Conference on Women (22-27 November 1999, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia) and the Arab Conference on Integrated Follow-up to Global Conferences, held by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) (29 November to 1 December, Beirut, Lebanon). A representative of the Office of the Special Adviser participated in the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) high-level meeting to review the implementation of the Jakarta Declaration and Platform for Action (26-29 October 1999, Bangkok, Thailand).

26. Participation in these regional meetings provided the opportunity for many informal meetings and discussions of the Special Adviser with governmental representatives to assess the status of national and regional preparations and to identify regional challenges, emerging issues and trends, and strategies for further action. During these missions, the Special Adviser also met with senior officials of regional commissions and held informal inter-agency meetings with gender focal points and field-based United Nations system representatives. It became apparent during these meetings that further efforts are needed to strengthen the flow of information between New York-based and field-based offices, including national machinery for the advancement of women, on the status of the global preparations for the special session. The Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women will participate in the remaining two regional preparatory meetings of ECE and of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

27. The Special Adviser attended FAO's High-level Consultation on Rural Women and Information, on behalf of the Secretary-General. The event was attended by over 360 participants from 118 countries, together with representatives from the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations. The Consultation reviewed a draft strategy for action on rural women as a follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and the World Food Summit (1996). The Special Adviser moderated a panel on methodologies and approaches to bringing information to rural areas, both through traditional forms of communication and through new technologies. During the meeting, the Special Adviser had opportunities to discuss follow-up to Beijing and preparations for the special session with ministers from a number of countries. She also participated in the UNESCO-sponsored Pan-African Women's Conference for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence, held in Zanzibar, United Republic of Tanzania, from 17 to 20 May 1999.

28. The Special Adviser opened and chaired the first day of the Judicial Colloquium on the Application of International Human Rights Law at the Domestic Level. The Colloquium, which was organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women, in close consultation with UNICEF, to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of

Discrimination against Women and the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, took place from 27 to 29 October at the United Nations Office in Vienna. During the three-day event, almost 100 judges and magistrates from 65 countries discussed opportunities for wider and more routine use at the national level of the international human rights law contained in the two Conventions as a way to advance the rights of women and children, particularly girls. In plenary and working group sessions, participants focused on three themes: nationality, and marriage and family relations; violence against women; and women's and girls' work-related rights. At the end of the three-day session, participants adopted a communiqué. A comprehensive report containing keynote presentations and working group papers will be issued by the Division in time for the special session.

C. ACC Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality

29. Following the fourth session of the ACC Inter-agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality (23-26 February 1999), inter-sessional work on a number of topics was conducted by the Committee's task managers. The Committee's fifth session will take place from 23 to 25 February 2000. A series of informal meetings were held in New York during the year. Based on a recommendation of the Inter-Agency Committee at its fourth session, in February 1999, the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) adopted a statement as input to the preparatory process. The statement will be made available to the preparatory committee. The results of several of the Committee's ongoing activities will also be provided as input to the preparatory process. The Special Adviser, in her capacity as Chairperson of the Inter-Agency Committee, will provide an oral report to the Commission/preparatory committee on the inputs.

30. In response to a decision of the Committee, the Division for the Advancement of Women, as the Committee's task manager, organized a workshop on women's empowerment in the context of human security. The workshop, which took place from 7 to 8 December 1999 in Bangkok, was hosted by ESCAP. The meeting brought together participants from a broad range of entities of the United Nations system and from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development/Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) Working Party on Gender Equality. Building on two previous workshops (on gender mainstreaming in 1997, and on a rights-based approach to gender equality in 1998) and in the context of the special session of the General Assembly in June 2000, the discussions focused on concrete actions to promote the interlinked issues of women's empowerment, gender equality, and human security.

31. The workshop adopted a communiqué summarizing its major findings. It noted that missing in discussions on human security has been an understanding of the fundamental differences and inequalities between women's security and men's security. The workshop identified five specific and interrelated issues that need to be incorporated into the discussion of human security – namely, violence against women and girls; gender inequalities in control over resources; gender inequalities in power and decision-making; women's human rights; and women (and men) as actors, not victims. Noting gaps in gender awareness of both policy and practice, the workshop proposed a number of recommendations for action to promote women's empowerment in the context of human security. At the policy level, they are:

(a) Incorporate gender-sensitive legislation and adherence to CEDAW in policy discussions and actions;

(b) Build on experience in facilitating policy dialogue that benefits from the interaction of non-governmental organizations and other actors in civil society with Governments to promote women's leadership;

(c) Establish effective accountability mechanisms for gender equality through more consistent documentation and dissemination of experiences and collection of data, disaggregated by sex, to influence policy formulation and operational activities;

(d) Recognize the leadership and innovative role that women are taking in conflict resolution and peace-building and support and incorporate those efforts in conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction.

32. At the level of practice, they are:

(a) Create an enabling environment that supports women's empowerment and provides

resources to organizations, including non-governmental organizations, that are actively involved in this process;

(b) Facilitate capacity development and improve legal literacy to ensure more effective use of the CEDAW mechanism and its Optional Protocol;

(c) Ensure women's participation and full gender mainstreaming in mandates and missions related to peace promotion and post-conflict reconstruction;

(d) Ensure that all reporting to intergovernmental bodies on peace-building, peacekeeping and reconstruction gives consistent attention to gender equality;

(e) Work to create a common database of materials relevant to gender equality and human security, including lessons learned, good practice, guidelines, terms of reference, training materials, research results, and codes of conduct.

33. A report on the proceedings of the workshop is being compiled by the Division for the Advancement of Women.

D. Update on national action plans

34. In the course of 1999, 11 Member States (Belgium, Burundi, Cape Verde, Eritrea, Greece, Malawi, Namibia, Netherlands, Qatar, Republic of Moldova, Yemen) and one observer (Switzerland) submitted their national action plans to the Division for the Advancement of Women. A total of 116 plans by Member States, two by observers and five by regional and subregional groups had been received as of 1 December 1999. The national action plans constituted the basis for the review and appraisal of the Beijing Platform for Action. Many Member States built their replies to the questionnaire on a review and appraisal of the national action plan.

E. Reported activities of non-governmental organizations and other institutions of civil society

35. Since the issuance of the latest report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (A/54/264), a number of events have occurred at the international, regional and national levels under the auspices of non-governmental organizations. Several initiatives have also been taken by non-governmental organizations worldwide as part of their preparations for the forthcoming special session of the General Assembly. While these activities were not reported systematically to the Secretariat, some of them have been brought to the attention of the Division for the Advancement of Women.

36. Various non-governmental organizations have been preparing their own reports on the progress of implementation as their contribution to the special session. Soroptomists International sent a questionnaire to its members worldwide to gather information. The International Confederation of Free Trade Union (ICFTU) Equality Committee will compile information collected from women trade unionists. Zonta International also sent out a survey questionnaire to its clubs to gather information about progress for women in each Zonta country and to establish the skills necessary for effective advocacy through the process of obtaining the information, and plans to feed the findings of the survey into its preparation for the special session. The NGO Working Groups on Girls (New York and Geneva) are in the process of completing an alternative report to that of Governments, evaluating recent progress for girls, to be presented to Governments and non-governmental organizations at the special session. The purpose of the report is to document the gaps between commitments and action, obstacles, and successful efforts by Governments and civil society organizations.

37. Non-governmental organizations have been active in compiling and disseminating information in order effectively to participate in the review process as well as at the special session. A scorecard/checklist for monitoring implementation of critical areas of concern on women and the media has been completed by Global WENT 99 as a possible template for other critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action. It will be disseminated to media networks, non-governmental organizations and other civil society organizations worldwide. The International Women's Tribune Centre has published three issues in a series entitled *Preview 2000* that cover plans and preparations for the five-year review of the Platform for Action. Isis International-Manila has prepared the primer on the review process which contains basic information on

activities, schedules, contact organizations and individuals involved in the preparations and the actual conduct of the special session. The primer is designed to inform and encourage the involvement of women's groups and organizations in the Asia and the Pacific region in assessing an international policy document that seeks to advance and promote women's empowerment and development.

38. Supported and sponsored by WomenWatch, WomenAction 2000 held a five-day workshop from 27 September to 2 October 1999 in Seoul, Republic of Korea, to train regional information facilitators and regional web site construction and maintenance people to develop a global web site that would serve as a central site for the collection, sharing and linking of information on the review process. The global web site was launched on 26 November 1999 (http://www.womenaction2000.org).

39. The community of non-governmental organizations has decided to hold an NGO working session from 3 to 4 June 2000, prior to the special session. The Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CONGO) facilitated the first meeting of the international planning committee on 11 August 1999. The second meeting was held on 23 November 1999, facilitated by the Centre for Women's Global Leadership.

40. As part of their campaign for the special session, Equality Now issued *Women's Action*, to cite discriminatory laws that remain in force despite repeated legal affirmations of the commitment to equality that are often incorporated into national constitutions as well as international law. Flora Tristan, in cooperation with UNICEF and UNIFEM, has published case studies, entitled "Roads to Beijing", which reflect on the Beijing process in Latin America and the Caribbean. Network Women in Development Europe held a conference in Eede, the Netherlands, from 28 to 30 May 1999, jointly with Society for International Development and Vrouwenberaad Ontwikkelingssamenwerking, to discuss how non-governmental organizations could effectively follow up on the United Nations global conferences. The report of the conference was published in October 1999, entitled "Linking up – Cairo, Copenhagen, Beijing +5 reviews towards the 21st century".

41. The National Council for Research on Women, in collaboration with the Division for the Advancement of Women and UNDP, held its 1999 annual conference from 9 to 11 December 1999, focusing on the visions and values of women's and girls' leadership and the five-year review of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. A one-day conference to review accomplishments since the Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Chicago on 6 December 1999. Entitled "Women's rights are human rights: exploring the local global linkages", the conference was sponsored and organized by a number of non-governmental organizations and women's groups working in the region.

III. Information supplied in accordance with specific mandates

A. Situation of Palestinian women and assistance provided by organizations in the United Nations system

42. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1999/15, requested a report on the situation of Palestinian women and assistance provided by organizations of the United Nations system. The paragraphs below cover the period from September 1998 to September 1999 and are based on information from United Nations bodies monitoring the situation of Palestinians in the occupied territories as well as in refugee camps. Such bodies include the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories (UNSCO) and the Special Rapporteur of the Commission for Human Rights on Palestinian Territories occupied since 1967. Information on assistance to Palestinian women was requested from the United Nations system, and replies from six entities have been included in the present report.

1. Situation of Palestinian women

43. In his report on economic and social conditions in the West Bank and Gaza, the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories stated that the overall economic performance in the West Bank and Gaza had improved since 1997. The positive economic

growth rate had led to an increase in employment and higher household incomes in the occupied territories. Women's unemployment rate in 1998 declined by 21.3 per cent, to 16.9 per cent; for men it fell to 15.5 per cent. The overall proportion of women active in the labour force declined in 1998, falling to 11.7 per cent from 12.3 per cent in 1997.[5] In 1998, over 92 per cent of all new job opportunities in the West Bank and Gaza were filled by men. This could be due to the fact that most of the jobs were in Israeli-controlled Areas[6] and in the construction sector where women's participation is negligible for both cultural and structural reasons. Labour-force surveys continue to show that women's wages have remained consistently below those of men and that wages in the economic sectors where women were disproportionately represented are below-average.[7]

44. An increase in household income in 1998 was due to a real increase in average wages. In 1998, wages could cover an average of 70.5 per cent of basic household needs and 52.2 per cent of total household expenditures, compared to 63.79 per cent and 46.4 per cent, respectively, in 1997. However, with the exception of a 4.5-per-cent increase in education expenditures, due perhaps to the increased enrolments in more expensive private schools, there was an overall decline of 2.1 per cent in real household expenditures in 1998.[7] It seems that uncertainty about the future continues to constrain consumer confidence, resulting in higher levels of forgone consumption. Also, household income that fails to cover all households needs has negative gender-related impacts, such as increasing the burden of unpaid work on women.

45. There were considerably fewer comprehensive and internal closure days imposed by the Israeli authorities on the West Bank and Gaza during 1998 — a loss of 5.2 per cent of total potential work days, as compared to a 20.5 per cent loss in 1997 — greatly enhancing income and productivity.[7] However, the severity of the closure policies continues to manifest itself in both the social and economic spheres.

46. The Special Rapporteur on Palestinian Territories occupied since 1967, Mr. Hannu Halinen (Finland) noted in his report to the Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-fifth session, on 20 January 1999, that the number of Palestinian prisoners being detained in Israeli prisons and detention centres has gone down to 2,200, of whom seven were women. The issue of Palestinian prisoners who remained in detention, in violation of articles 49 and 76 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, was a cause of concern and tension in the occupied territories.[8] In Gaza, the Special Rapporteur met with former detainees and prisoners and was informed that their wives and children had experienced economic difficulties because the prisoners were often the sole breadwinners of their families. Family visits had been few, owing to both frequent transfer of prisoners in Israel and the difficulty of obtaining a permit to enter Israel.[9]

47. According to the report of the Special Rapporteur, some former prisoners suffered from psychological traumas which affected their families.[10] He suggested that the disturbing phenomenon of domestic violence in the occupied territories could partly be a consequence of psychological trauma experienced by former prisoners.

48. The Special Rapporteur reported that there had been fewer deaths at checkpoints as a result of ambulances being delayed by permit checks. Two deaths were reported in 1998. One was that of a mother who did not have a permit to enter Israel who died after childbirth while waiting at the checkpoint in Hebron. The Rapporteur noted that the Israeli army admitted that that was a mistake and brought the soldiers before a military court.[11]

49. According to the Special Rapporteur, the expansion of existing Israeli settlements and the building of new ones, as well as the construction of bypass roads, continued to be a source of great concern in the occupied territories and to have an effect on the socio-economic life of Palestinians. For example, the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories reported that on 23 November a Palestinian woman from Hebron was found dead near the settlement of El-Azar, south of Bethlehem. Palestinian police accused settlers of her murder.[12] The Special Committee also reported an incident in which a Palestinian woman was attacked by settlers while re-entering her neighbourhood which had been under closure.[13]

50. The Special Committee reported that five Palestinian girls were injured in an incident which took place on 26 November 1998, involving Palestinian teachers and schoolgirls, Israeli policemen and some female settlers from Bet-Hadassa. The head teacher stated that female settlers began shouting at them as

they walked by the Jewish settlement. The confrontation then escalated into a major scuffle. Israeli police were called in and reported that the students were asked to end their protest and go back to school. After refusing, a few were detained.[14]

51. It was also reported by the Special Committee that a violent confrontation occurred between angry Palestinian stone throwers and Israeli soldiers on 28 December 1998, following the eviction of two families at Kifl Harith.[13] During the confrontation seven Palestinians and two soldiers were injured, and 20 women refused to evacuate one family's house. They were forced out by tear gas fired into the house.

2. Follow-up activities to the Fourth World Conference on Women

52. Palestine responded to the Secretariat's questionnaire on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

53. Following the adoption of the Platform for Action and in light of regional, Arab and national Palestinian instruments approved in the preparatory stages of the Conference and the outcome of the Arab ministerial conference held in Amman in September 1996, work was carried out at official and grass-roots levels to formulate a national strategy for Palestinian women, taking into account Palestinian resources and the priority needs of Palestinian women. As a result of these efforts, a national strategy for Palestinian women was formulated and announced at a conference held in June 1997.

54. Organizational mechanisms have been created to fulfil this goal. At the governmental level, a coordination framework (the Interministerial Coordination Committee) was formed of representatives from the women's affairs departments in ministries and State institutions with a view to promoting the national status of Palestinian women. The Committee pursues its work in accordance with the Beijing Platform and the needs and priorities of Palestinian women with a view to translating those into various activities and programmes.

55. The response of the Palestinian National Authority to the questionnaire provided comprehensive information on the situation of women. Based on the priorities of Palestinian women, activities were undertaken in accordance with the Platform with particular emphasis on the eight priority areas.

56. According to the report, traditions notwithstanding, the gender concept is now accepted in Palestinian society and the stereotypical image of women has begun to change. More education and employment are now available for women, and their capacity to work and participate in production and to use modern technologies will grow, thus strengthening their role and their equality with men in the fundamental areas of concern discussed in Beijing.

3. Assistance to Palestinian women

57. Information provided by the United Nations system shows that gender concerns are being increasingly integrated into the continuing assistance of organizations of the United Nations system to Palestinian women. This assistance ranges across various areas such as education, income-generation activities, capacity-building and institution-building. However, no information was provided in the critical area of reproductive health.

58. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) supported the establishment of a Women's Human Rights Unit in a local non-governmental organization which focuses on legal research and education to improve the status of women in Palestinian society and the provision of legal aid to both individual women and women's groups. The Office is also assisting legislators and civil society organizations in a review of personal status legislation. In addition, it is participating in the United Nations Gender Task Force, which has recently been focusing its efforts on the organization of a campaign on the prevention of violence against women.

59. During the period under review, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) carried out the following activities in support of the Palestinian National Authority:

(a) Provision of technical assistance and advisory services to the National Committee for Palestinian Women for Follow-up to Beijing in preparation of the Palestinian national report on implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action;

(b) Preparation of a research paper on gender and citizenship and the role of non-governmental organizations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip before and after the peace accords.

60. Since 1994, the World Food Programme (WFP) has been concentrating its activities in Gaza and the West Bank on poverty alleviation and social relief, aimed at reaching the most severely affected populations.

61. In May 1998, the WFP office began a two-year project which supports the social safety net programme of the Ministry of Social Affairs, addressing the urgent food security needs of poor households. About 16,000 very poor households in Gaza and 12,000 in the West Bank are benefiting from WFP food assistance. Of those, over 65 per cent are headed by women.

62. This strategy is based on the WFP commitments to women's advancement (1996-2001) following the Beijing Conference, which are aimed at reducing gender inequalities. In addition to the social safety net schemes, WFP has been providing food for the following gender-related activities in 1998-1999: training of 23 women in social work; literacy programmes for 754 women in Gaza; training in kitchen gardening and water recycling for 150 women; training in health care for 85 women; food-for-work for 50 women from low-income households.

63. In addition, to combat the conservative values limiting opportunities for Palestinian women, the WFP office is organizing gender-awareness sessions with WFP staff, governmental counterparts, and non-governmental organization implementing partners.

64. A recent assessment of activities (April 1999) noted that particular efforts had been made to involve women in all project activities at the decision-making level and as active beneficiaries.

65. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) provides essential education, health and relief and social services to some 3.6 million registered Palestine refugees in the Agency's area of operations, comprising Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Assistance to Palestinian women was delivered within the context of the Agency's regular programmes for Palestinian refugees.

66. In the 1998/99 scholastic year, 458,716 pupils were enrolled in Agency preparatory, elementary, and secondary schools, of whom 228,935, or 49.9 per cent, were female. Women accounted for 62 per cent of trainees in UNRWA's technical/semi-professional courses. Of the 866 continuing UNRWA scholarships in 1998/99, 46 per cent were held by women.

67. UNRWA provided expanded maternal and child health care and family planning services to Palestine refugees as an integral part of its primary health care services, in recognition of the fact that the burden of child and reproductive ill-health falls overwhelmingly on women in terms of complications in pregnancy and childbirth, infant and maternal mortality, congenital malformations and disability. With women of reproductive age and children comprising two thirds of the 3.6 million registered Palestinian refugees, that investment in maternal and child health was key for socio-economic development.

68. Difficult socio-economic conditions in refugee communities during the reporting period continued to create greater reliance on income earned by women. More than 50 per cent of UNRWA's special hardship case families, who received direct food and material assistance from the Agency, were headed by women. UNRWA's women-in-development programme provided a wide range of social, cultural, and educational services at the community level. Seventy women's programme centres served as focal points within the refugee community for UNRWA's work with women. During the period from June 1998 to July 1999, a total of 20,534 participants benefited from various programme centre activities such as lectures on health and civil society, legal assistance, childcare, computer and language skills training, and physical fitness courses. The programme centres continued to work towards administrative and financial self-sustainability.

69. During 1998/99, UNRWA's Income Generation Programme granted loans valued at $1.67 million to 2,612 women who supported 13,060 dependants. Since 1994 the programme has provided loans worth $8.18 million to 11,736 women organized in 1,773 solidarity groups. These women were granted loans at the end of each successful repayment cycle. The programme was self-sufficient, with all operational costs and loan loss provision covered from revenues generated by lending and banking activities. The programme maintained an annual repayment rate of 99.64 percent.

70. During the reporting period, a total of 1,526 women benefited from the UNRWA Poverty

Alleviation Programme, which provided small amounts of credit for income-generation projects.

71. In 1996 the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) initiated a project to support women's departments within various ministries to promote gender equality The project aimed to enhance the capacity of the ministries to mainstream gender and development and to create gender-sensitive policies, strategies and programmes. The project was completed in 1998.

72. The sharing of information, coordination of planning and exchange of experience within the framework of the project have improved the capacity of the women's departments to impart a gender perspective into all ministries of the Palestinian National Authority. Due to UNDP's capacity-building, organizational strengthening and institutional development efforts, different ministries were subsequently able to create, formulate and begin to implement their own projects to meet the needs of their target groups.

73. In order to strengthen the newly established women's department at the Ministry for Culture, UNDP, in 1998, funded a women's creative writing and illustrative arts competition. Almost 200 women participated in the competition, and the winners were honoured in an official ceremony. The five winning pieces in each category will be published in 1999 in the form of booklets.

74. In 1999, in an attempt to move away from the welfare system currently utilized by the Ministry of Social Affairs towards a more development-oriented approach, UNDP, in cooperation with the women's department in the Ministry, initiated a poverty alleviation project within the Ministry to support deprived families and groups, through income-generating projects and the creation of new job opportunities, with a special focus on women-headed households. Phase I of the project will entail the creation of a poverty alleviation centre. During phase II, the centre will study project proposals from the target groups based on pre-established criteria which will enable the individuals or groups to work their way out of poverty.

75. During 1997-1998 UNDP, in cooperation with the Inter-ministerial Committee for the Advancement of Women, initiated and succeeded in establishing a one-year pilot project, the Rural Girls Development Project, in Silt El-Dhaher, Jenin. In 1999, the Project was implemented in three centres in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

76. On the non-governmental level, UNDP supports the formulation of a gap analysis report on the status of women in the occupied territories within the framework of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). This initiative is being implemented in cooperation with the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling and involves a training symposium for mid-level and upper-level decision makers from non-governmental as well as governmental organizations to disseminate information on CEDAW and create working groups that will be following economic rights, education and training, family rights, health rights, political participation and representation, and the eradication of violence against women. The gap analysis report is expected to be published in March 2000.

77. In an attempt to promote a gender sensitive educational system, UNDP in 1997 developed a project to assist four educational non-governmental organizations in elaborating gender-sensitive curricula addressing the special needs of boys and girls. Teachers have been trained to develop modules that incorporate gender concerns into the learning process. During these training sessions a training manual on gender issues was prepared. Distributed to schools, it is to be used as an aid in the practical application of a gender perspective in the classrooms. The project covered public, private and UNRWA schools and included a community awareness campaign with a variety of reach-out activities such as a weekly radio programmes for youth addressing gender issues. It was successfully completed at the end of 1998.

78. UNDP participates actively in the United Nations Inter-Agency Gender Task Force, which aims to move towards joint Women in Development/Gender and Development (WID/GAD) programming among United Nations agencies and to advocate for and support Palestinian partner institutions to mainstream gender into their policy-making process. In November 1999, within the framework of the Women's Rights Campaign, UNDP funded three TV spots on violence against women and a study day "Poverty and violence".

79. UNIFEM has established the second phase of its post-Beijing follow-up project with the following objectives: to support and strengthen permanent institutional women's machinery; to ensure the integration of gender concerns into the national planning process; and to consolidate the women's machinery network on the national, regional and international levels. The project which was initiated in October 1998 endeavours to focus on the three main thematic areas. In each project country, critical areas of concern have been identified as national priorities. For the Palestinian territories, they are: legislation, policies, economics, social dimension, education, health, environment, media and women under occupation.

80. UNIFEM has also initiated a Women in Development Facilitation Project which aims to strengthen the capacity of governmental and non-governmental organizations to follow up on the Platform of Action by documenting WID/GAD programmes and projects that are being undertaken in the Palestinian territories by various international and national governmental and non-governmental organizations. The compiled information will be widely disseminated to facilitate information exchange on WID/GAD issues among donors, United Nations agencies, and the Palestinian Authority, in addition to local and international civil society organizations, in order to ensure complementation of initiatives and prevent duplication.

4. Concluding remarks

81. In spite of considerable efforts on the part of the Palestinian Authority and civil society and by the organizations of the United Nations system to improve the economic and social conditions of Palestinian women, their situation still requires special attention. They still experience unequal access to the labour market and to income-generating activities. They are also victims of de facto occupational segregation accompanied by lower wages in the employment sectors in which they are concentrated.

82. As reflected in previous reports, the status and living conditions of Palestinian women are closely linked with the progress of the peace process. The present report shows that women in the occupied territories continue to be affected in an adverse manner by a variety of measures, such as closures and settlement activities.

83. The mainstreaming of a gender perspective into nation-building programmes and the full and equal participation of Palestinian women are critical to the sustainable outcome of the peace. With those objectives in mind, organizations of the United Nations system will continue to assist Palestinian women to increase their capabilities to participate fully and equally in the peace process and to build and develop Palestinian society.

B. Release of women and children taken hostage in armed conflicts and imprisoned

84. The Commission on the Status of Women, at its forty-third session, adopted resolution 43/1 on the release of women and children taken hostage in armed conflicts, including those subsequently imprisoned. The Commission requested the Secretary-General to prepare, taking into account the information provided by Member States and relevant international organizations, a report on the implementation of resolution 43/1 for submission to the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-fourth session. In pursuit of that mandate, the Secretary-General sent a note verbale to all Member States on 17 September 1999. As of 20 November 1999, the Secretariat had received 12 replies, six from Governments and six from the United Nations system.

85. The Governments of Antigua and Barbuda, Brunei Darussalam and the United Republic of Tanzania reported that the issue described in resolution 43/1 was not relevant to them since they were not involved in any armed conflicts.

86. The Government of Thailand reported that, although the issue of women and children taken hostage was not relevant to its context, Thailand had been providing shelter, education and health services to refugees, displaced persons and asylum seekers from the armed conflict in neighbouring countries, most of whom were women and children.

87. The Governments of Australia and Norway reported that they sought to follow-up on the resolution through their involvement in international activities related to humanitarian issues, preventive action, peacekeeping and peace-building.

88. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations provided information from three of its field missions. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) reported that four women and three boys under 18 years old and 11 other boys who were under 18 years old at the time of their arrest continued to be imprisoned in El Khiam prison, operated by the South Lebanese Army. In a signed affidavit submitted to the High Court of Justice on 27 September 1999 in response to a petition on behalf of four of the El Khiam prisoners, Major General Dan Halutz, Head of Israeli Army Operations, admitted that its General Security Service (Shin Bet) instructed and paid the interrogators and jailers at El Khiam prison. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is the only organization that has access to El Khiam prison, but it has yet to make a statement regarding the conditions in the prison.

89. The United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) reported that the terms of resolution 43/1, specifically the reference to hostage-taking, did not appear to have direct application to cases in the Western Sahara. However, the parties to the conflict, the Government of Morocco and the Frente Polisario, have each charged that the other is holding women and/or children hostage.

90. The United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) reported that the war in Sierra Leone had been characterized by widespread abduction of civilians, including women and children, by the forces opposed to the State. In the period prior to the adoption of the Lomé Peace Accord in July 1999, thousands of civilians were abducted. Estimates of the number of people in captivity at that time ranged from 12,000 to 20,000. According to UNAMSIL, one indicator of the scale of the problem was that some 3,000 children were abducted from just one location, Freetown, the capital city, during a rebel incursion in January 1999. UNAMSIL also reported that up to 30 per cent of the estimated 15,000 rebel combatants were children, most of whom had initially been abducted. Abductees had been used as porters, human shields and for forced sexual activity.

91. The Lomé Peace Accord stipulates that all abductees should be released immediately. Within its framework, a committee was established to facilitate the release programme. The committee is chaired by the UNAMSIL Chief Military Observer and includes United Nations human rights officers, representatives of non-governmental organizations, United Nations agencies, representatives of the parties to the Peace Accord, and, as an observer, ICRC. UNAMSIL reported that by September 1999, there had been a disappointing number of less than 500 people released formally. It also reported that a considerable number of captives had been released quietly and had slipped back to their homes. However, a large number of abductees remained in captivity, and the United Nations, through the committee, had recognized the need for sustained and effective advocacy and intervention on the matter. UNAMSIL also reported that released abductees frequently displayed signs of significant physical ill treatment. Almost all released females reported rape and other forms of sexual abuse. Many women, when released, were found to be pregnant. In close cooperation with relevant non-governmental organizations, programmes are being put in place to assist these persons. Upon release, all children benefit from care and family-tracing resources made available under the guidance of UNICEF.

92. In their replies, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the World Food Programme and three regional commissions (ECA, ECLAC, and ESCWA) did not provide any specific information on women and children taken hostage.

C. Women, the girl child and human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome

93. In its resolution 43/2, "Women, the girl child and human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome", the Commission on the Status of Women noted the growing proportion of women becoming infected with HIV in every region, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and among the younger age groups. The Commission asked Governments, relevant United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, individually and collectively, to make every effort to place combating HIV/AIDS as a priority on the development agenda and to implement effective prevention strategies and programmes. It called upon the international community to intensify its support of national efforts against HIV/AIDS, particularly in favour of women and young girls, in the worst hit regions of Africa and invited the Secretary-General to report to the

Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-fourth session. The Commission urged Governments, with the assistance of relevant United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, to adopt a long-term, timely, coherent and integrated AIDS prevention policy, with public information and education programmes specifically tailored to the needs of women and girls within their socio-cultural contexts and sensitivities and specific needs in their life cycle.

94. The present report complements information contained in other reports before the Commission.[16] In its section on health the report on the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, based on replies by Governments, highlights the fact that many countries have taken action on HIV/AIDS. It also highlights specific activities of the international community in line with the resolution. Information on women and HIV/AIDS was requested from the United Nations system, and replies from the nine entities who had responded as of 15 December 1999 have been included in the present report.

1. Women and HIV/AIDS

Trends in HIV/AIDS infection of women

95. HIV/AIDS infection rates among women have been rising steadily, with new information suggesting that there are significantly more women than men living with HIV infection in sub-Saharan Africa. Studies conducted in nine different African countries suggest that between 12 and 13 women are infected for every 10 men. It is estimated that 12.2 million women and 10.1 million men aged 15-49 were living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa at the end of 1999. Women tend to be infected at a younger age than men for biological and cultural reasons. Girls in Africa aged 15-19 years are five or six times more likely to be HIV positive than boys of the same age. The strongest increase worldwide in infection rates have occurred in the newly independent States of the former Soviet Union. As the prevalence of sexually transmitted infections had also increased considerably, the risk of further spread of HIV infection among the larger population and, in particular, among women was very high.[17]

96. Physiological differences in the genital tract contribute to the higher risk for women of acquiring HIV infection and sexually transmitted diseases. Gender norms limit women's ability to determine their level of risk due to ignorance about sex and sexuality, lower status in society and relationships and economic and social dependency on male partners. Gender is a decisive factor for people living with HIV/AIDS, since the burden of care generally falls on female members of the household. The stigma of living with HIV/AIDS is more painful for women than men, and the women affected are often victims of violence and discrimination. Mother-to-child transmission of HIV during pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding is of particular concern. Nine out of 10 of all HIV-infected babies were born in Africa as a consequence of high fertility rates combined with high infection rates.

Mainstreaming a gender perspective

97. The urgent need for a more coherent and intensified United Nations-system response to the pandemic was the rationale for the creation of the Joint and Co-sponsored United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) in 1996 by its co-sponsoring organizations, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UNDP, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank. The Programme had increasingly addressed the gender dimension of the pandemic. Gender-based differences were taken into account in risks and vulnerability-reduction approaches. UNAIDS was cooperating with women's networks that undertake advocacy, prevention and offer care and support to women affected by HIV/AIDS. To focus more specifically on gender issues, the UNAIDS Inter-Agency Working Group on Gender and AIDS was established in 1996. It brought together technical experts on gender to act as a policy advisory body on issues relating to gender and HIV/AIDS. Its role encompassed joint planning of substantive programmes that address gender concerns in HIV and development and finding ways in which gender can be incorporated into all the United Nations programmes and departments dealing with HIV/AIDS.

98. All of the United Nations entities have provided support to national efforts against HIV/AIDS, with a focus on gender issues, including advocacy efforts and policy advice to include the issue on the national and international agenda. At the regional level, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) addressed HIV/AIDS in the programme of the 1999 Conference of Ministers of Finance and Ministers of Planning and

Economic Development and at the meeting of the Committee on Women and Development. It was noted that the sense of urgency in addressing the HIV/AIDS issue seemed to vary from one African subregion to another.

99. HIV/AIDS was a key issue during the preparatory process leading up to the special session of the General Assembly for the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (1999). A number of priority areas for further action were adopted relating to the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS.

100. The World Bank has highlighted the need for top-level political commitment in terms of protection of women's rights, an expansion of health and educational facilities that are both physically accessible and socially acceptable to women, and a wide range of other multisectoral reforms that would bring about a sustained reduction in the risk of HIV transmission to women. In close collaboration with other international organizations, the World Bank has helped to place issues relating to HIV/AIDS and women on the agenda in a variety of international forums. The Bank's Economic Development Institute (EDI) and UNAIDS jointly conducted nine policy seminars for policy makers from 28 African and Asian countries, focusing on potential intervention strategies in specific vulnerable sectors.

101. United Nations entities are aware that action at the national level was crucial and that all means for reaching out to various groups should be employed. At the country level, HIV/AIDS prevention activities have been coordinated by the UNAIDS theme groups on HIV/AIDS. The United Nations system currently has 132 theme groups in over 150 countries, and partnerships are being expanded. Many groups include representatives from host country Governments, non-governmental and bilateral organizations and associations of people living with HIV/AIDS. This has increased understanding of factors influencing risk and vulnerability and of effective ways to address them.

102. The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), in close collaboration with UNFPA and UNAIDS, supported a pilot initiative entitled "Gender-focused responses to address the challenges of HIV/AIDS". Orientation workshops on gender concerns in HIV and development were organized for UNIFEM and its partners in six pilot countries. In the Bahamas, India, Mexico, Senegal, Viet Nam, and Zimbabwe, partnerships between organizations working on gender and organizations working on HIV have been formed. Activities have included community-based data collection on the gender impact of the epidemic; capacity-building of media personnel in gender, HIV and human rights concerns; documentation of the abuses of human rights of people living with HIV/AIDS; and the development of resource materials on how to empower women to negotiate safe sex. A set of training materials has been developed which facilitates effective advocacy of gender and AIDS concerns. Causes and consequences of the epidemic are explored from a gender perspective which has enabled policy makers and planners to allocate and plan resources for the prevention of the epidemic in a gender-responsive manner.

103. With UNESCO's assistance, a comprehensive and Africa-wide project entitled "Guidance, counselling and youth development for Africa" was set up to train trainers and youth workers in guidance and counselling techniques to meet the needs of young people, particularly girls, as they enter adolescence. UNESCO/UNAIDS organized a regional workshop on preventive education against HIV/AIDS for grass-roots women's organizations in Africa (Abidjan, 1998). UNESCO stated that only a small percentage of the organizations working in the area asserted that they took gender into account in the preparation and dissemination of educational messages. To raise their level of risk awareness, men needed to be encouraged to show greater respect and protection towards women.

104. The International Labour Organization (ILO) launched its Preventive AIDS programme in Africa, in collaboration with UNAIDS, and intends to incorporate more AIDS awareness in private-sector initiatives. ILO uses existing international instruments like Convention 156, which emphasizes family responsibilities for promoting gender concerns in HIV/AIDS issues, especially those relating to male responsibility. It has undertaken studies on the commercial sex sector and child labour, since those groups are particularly exposed to the vulnerabilities that promote the spread of the HIV virus and have to cope with its effects.

2. Specific issues of concern

Promotion of female-controlled methods of prevention and vaccine development

105. The male condom represents the primary prevention technology available to protect against HIV infection during sexual intercourse. Increasing demands to find alternative prevention methods for women have led to the development of the female condom and research on vaginal microbicides that offer women more control for the protection of their reproductive and sexual health. The introduction of combination and anti-retroviral treatment has become a standard of care in developed countries and is the most effective treatment available for suppressing the replication of HIV. It has produced ethical challenges in both developed and developing countries, where the vast majority of the world's infected people live without access to new treatments. The development of vaccines that are inexpensive and easy to administer remains a priority for developing countries.

106. UNFPA and UNAIDS have been cooperating on condom distribution requirements through the Global Initiative on Global Health Commodities. WHO and UNAIDS have been working to ensure that methods capable of providing dual protection (against pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases) were given high priority. An informal consultation, "Launching and promoting the female condom in Eastern and Southern Africa" was organized in April 1999 in Pretoria, South Africa. Participants recommended possible ways forward for the effective, extensive and timely introduction and promotion of female condoms. Reducing the price of female condoms by re-using them was seen as a potentially important strategy; the impact on the safety and efficacy of the method was being investigated. WHO has been working with UNAIDS in assisting countries to make female condoms available in the most appropriate and inexpensive way, working with social marketing organizations, the manufacturer and governmental and non-governmental organizations. Involving and targeting men was seen as crucial in order for the product to be useful and acceptable, as social marketing experiences in Zambia and Zimbabwe showed. The two agencies have been developing a planning and programming guide for the female condom, which would be available early in 2000. UNAIDS and WHO were also involved in promoting the development of a microbicide, which could be an empowering tool, reducing women's social susceptibilities to the epidemic. The results have not been very encouraging, since pharmaceutical companies have not assisted in making the drug available to large parts of the developing countries.

107. The World Bank has been implementing a number of projects to increase the prevalence of modern methods of contraception and to slow the spread of HIV infection by both promoting behavioural and social change and increasing the facilities designed to treat sexually transmitted diseases among women and men in Burkina Faso, Chad and Kenya. Programme activities are designed to encourage women to recognize and seek treatment for sexually transmitted diseases.

Mother-to-child transmission and care of children orphaned by AIDS

108. Mother-to-child transmission (MTCT) of HIV during pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding is of particular concern. Nine out of 10 of all HIV-infected babies in Africa are born as a consequence of high infection rates. Mother-to-child transmission of HIV is eroding improvements in child survival in several of the most affected countries in Africa south of the Sahara. The care of and support for children orphaned by AIDS has increasingly come to the centre of attention and was the topic of the International World AIDS Day, 1999.

109. The immediate challenge is to reduce the transmission of HIV from mother to child, while at the same time reducing the overall number of infected women of reproductive age. HIV is acquired by the infant from the mother around the time of birth or through breastfeeding. Interventions such as anti-retroviral drugs, caesarian sections and alternative feeding options can significantly reduce the rate of transmission. Where the financial resources and technical infrastructure exist and where HIV testing can determine a pregnant woman's seropositive status, these interventions have brought mother-to-child transmission of HIV under reasonable levels of control. The use of different short-course anti-retroviral regimens given during labour and for one week postpartum have been demonstrated to reduce significantly mother-to-child transmission.

110. The mother-to-child transmission (MTCT) Inter-Agency Task Team, a joint UNICEF/WHO/UNAIDS/UNFPA initiative on prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS, was established in 1998. Projects were being carried out on a pilot basis in nine countries (Botswana, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Rwanda, United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe). Measures for an integrated approach to significantly reduce mother-to-child transmission would include increased access to voluntary counselling and HIV testing, greater knowledge of men and women about their seropositive status, strong reinforcement of prevention messages by allowing people to act on the basis of their test results, expansion and strengthening of family planning information and services, early access to quality antenatal care with trained health and social workers, voluntary counselling, and HIV testing for women and their partners. Furthermore, it would include provision of anti-retroviral medication to prevent HIV transmission from seropositive women to their babies, improved care during labour, delivery and the postpartum period, counselling for HIV positive women on infant feeding choices, making replacement feeding available when needed and supporting women in their choice of feeding. The opportunity for promoting behavioural change through services related to pregnancy and delivery, the only entry point for service provision for many women in developing countries, should not be lost.

111. Specific activities on orphans has been carried out by several United Nations entities. FAO produced a report on rural children living in farm systems affected by HIV/AIDS. Farm households and extended families readily take in orphan children, but assistance provided by households and communities collapses when the increase in demand and numbers becomes unmanageable. UNICEF undertook various activities to care for orphans and provide skills that would help them avoid being legally or sexually exploited. The current decline in official development assistance (ODA) is threatening assistance to the children victims of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. At the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, 15 October 1999, UNESCO launched an appeal to individuals, the business sector, non-governmental organizations, foundations, agencies and others to contribute to the welfare of children orphaned by AIDS so that they could receive food and shelter, good health care and education.

Violence against women affecting the health of women and girls

112. Steps have been taken to change harmful traditions and practices affecting the health of women and girls and to eliminate all forms of violence against women, which was identified as one of the root causes of HIV infection (A/54/341). Gender-based violence threatens sexual and reproductive health and greatly increases women's and girls' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. The interplay between victimization and HIV infection is becoming increasingly evident and needs to be addressed through programmes that provide women with access to resources, capacity-building and empowerment and health services, in particular in the area of reproductive and sexual health care.

113. WHO is supporting a multicountry study on the prevalence, risk and protective factors and health consequences of violence against women. The study, currently under way in Bangladesh, Brazil, Namibia, Peru, the Philippines, United Republic of Tanzania and Thailand, is collecting data with a core protocol and using research teams that include at least one organization working with women experiencing violence. The results of the study, to be available in 2001, will provide comparative data for the first time on which to base intervention and prevention strategies.

114. The World Food Programme (WFP) has cooperated with organizations that provide women and girls with a safety net when they are vulnerable to risk of violence and HIV/AIDS infection. WFP has provided food to two institutions in Cambodia which rescue girls at risk of HIV/AIDS and offers skills and empowerment training so that they can have a source of income other than prostitution. UNESCO reported that funding had been approved to launch a two-year inter-agency project (UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNIFEM, UNFPA and WHO) on the eradication of female genital mutilation in Kenya.

Sexual and reproductive health education for young people, particularly girls

115. Given the high infection rate among young women, particularly among girls, special efforts were made by the United Nations entities to improve prevention and raise awareness. The overall objective was to provide women and girls with the required

awareness and skills to tackle HIV and reduce the current rate of HIV transmission and sexually transmitted diseases.

116. UNESCO developed a programme for preventive education and communication which had been especially designed for societies in which men traditionally have the dominant role and women have little control over their own sexual behaviour and reproductive capacities. A series of regional seminars were organized for decision makers from the education sector. Specialists and teachers in China and Thailand participated in a regional workshop on the prevention of HIV/AIDS and drug abuse by improving the quality of curricula and teachers, organized by UNESCO and UNDCP (Beijing, 1997). UNESCO/UNAIDS held a regional workshop on preventive education against HIV/AIDS for grass-roots women's organizations in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, for 17 countries in sub-Saharan Africa. UNAIDS has been funding the UNESCO project on HIV/AIDS preventive education and health education for adolescents, particularly girls at high risk, in Chile.

117. The UNAIDS interregional project on the integration of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV prevention activities into reproductive health programmes at the primary health-care level comprises activities such as HIV/AIDS prevention training and gender-sensitive counselling skills for health information and service providers, including medical doctors, midwives, nurses, community health workers, psychologists, social workers, peer educators, counsellors and other groups that serve as multiplier agents for dissemination of information regarding HIV/AIDS prevention.

118. UNICEF is carrying out a project on integrating gender awareness into adolescent sexual health programmes, implemented by the Commonwealth Secretariat. The project has two phases: the development of an outline and a review with young people; and the pretesting of the educational materials and preparation of a guidebook.

119. Although it had no mandate to intervene directly on HIV/AIDS, the World Food Programme (WFP) has taken an active role in empowering women and educating girls so that they will be more aware of their rights and better informed about the dangers of HIV/AIDS. Activities include a vulnerable group development programme in Bangladesh and a pilot programme of take-home rations for girls in primary school in Benin, where enrolment increased — in one case by 280 per cent — after WFP gave food as an incentive to girls.

Support for women living with HIV/AIDS

120. Women and girls living with HIV/AIDS are often stigmatized and victims of violence and discrimination. The Commission on the Status of Women urged the creation of an environment that promotes compassion and support for those infected with HIV and the provision of a legal framework that would protect the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS. Various forms of support have been provided. The ECA African Centre for Women offers economic activities empowering women so that they can cope with the causes and consequences of the epidemic.

121. WHO and UNAIDS supported a project to explore the impact of HIV/AIDS on HIV-positive women's reproductive health and rights, focusing on women's experiences of the health service. Coordinated by the International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS (ICW), the participatory research project, carried out by HIV-positive women who are also the subject of the study, was being conducted in Thailand and Zimbabwe over 18 months. The results will be available in 2001. The project hopes to provide policy recommendations on measures to be taken to protect HIV-positive women from gender discrimination and to promote improvements in programmes and policies.

3. Conclusions

Good practices

122. The United Nations entities recognize that, for expanding the quality and scope of engendered HIV/AIDS strategies and interventions and thus for programme replicability, it is crucial to identify, promote and apply "best practices" in reducing both the risk and vulnerability of women and girls. One "best practice" is the innovative pilot project co-sponsored by UNIFEM, UNAIDS, and UNFPA on gender-focused responses to address the challenges of HIV/AIDS. The project was launched to address the challenge of HIV/AIDS in six countries (Bahamas, India, Mexico, Senegal, Thailand, and Zimbabwe). It aims at strengthening the capacity of women's organizations to recognize HIV/AIDS as a critical

gender issue and to address it through a variety of initiatives. UNESCO is striving to reinforce the capacity of local facilitators in raising awareness, identifying examples of "best practice" concerning HIV/AIDS preventive education and proposing the compilation of strategies and research on the transfer of gender-sensitive health messages to illiterate and semi-illiterate people.

123. In its meeting held in June 1999, the UNAIDS Inter-Agency Working Group on Gender changed its modality of supporting individual initiatives through its members and instead evolved a unified work plan whereby it will develop a generic advocacy document/technical guide that will assist member agencies in the implementation of a programme/project in a particular country.

Further suggested activities

124. A gender-based response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic requires continued efforts, coordination and commitment over the long term at the country, regional and global levels within the framework of the United Nations system strategic plan for HIV/AIDS for 2001-2005 and within the work of the UNAIDS Inter-Agency Working Group on Gender. The new International Partnership Against AIDS in Africa, launched in January 1999 by the UNAIDS co-sponsors and secretariat must be given the highest priority, since more than half of current HIV/AIDS global infections are found in that continent.

125. Strategies should focus on improving women's control over their reproductive health, because there is clinical evidence that infections of the reproductive tract and sexually transmitted diseases substantially increase the risk of HIV transmission.

126. Access to voluntary testing and counselling for men and women should be promoted.

127. The development of advocacy activities, including advocacy kits targeted at governmental officials and policy makers; senior health managers; religious, community, women and youth leaders; journalists and others is necessary in order to advance legal and policy reform concerning HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment. Special emphasis should be put on the impact of the epidemic on girls and women.

128. Vaccine development, promotion of female controlled methods of prevention and measures to decrease mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS infection need to be reinforced.

Notes

[1] See *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution I, annexes I and II.

[2] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 16* (A/53/16), part two, chap. II, para. 20.

[3] Ibid., *Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 6* (A/54/6/Rev.1), vol. I, paras. 44-49.

[4] See E/CN.6/1999/2 and A/54/264.

[5] *UNSCO Report on Economic and Social Conditions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip* (spring 1999), issued by the Office of the Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories (Gaza, 30 April 1999).

[6] According to the 1999 UNSCO report, Israeli-controlled areas included Israel, Israeli settlements and industrial zones in the occupied territories.

[7] According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, and cited in the 1999 UNSCO report.

[8] "Report on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, submitted by Mr. Hannu Halinen, Special Rapporteur, pursuant to Commission on Human Rights resolution 1993/2 A" (E/CN.4/1999/24), para. 28.

[9] Ibid., para. 29.

[10] Ibid., para. 36.

[11] Ibid., para. 46.

[12] Note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories (A/54/73),, para. 148.

[13] Ibid., para 173.

[14] Ibid., para. 150.

[15] Ibid., para. 171.

[16] "Review and appraisal of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action" (E/CN.6/2000/PC.2); "Final assessment of the system-wide medium-term plan for the Advancement of Women" (E/CN.6/2000/3).

[17] UNAIDS/WHO, Global AIDS Epidemic Up-date: December 1999 (Geneva).